

## Step 4

# Develop Short- and Long-term Strategies with an Action Plan

## Tasks

- Summarize priority gaps and create groupings which interrelate
- Develop short- and long-term strategies
- Link gaps to possible resources
- Assign responsibilities and develop timeframes
- Adopt a written Continuum of Care Plan

**Purpose:** *This session will assist communities with the process of crafting and building consensus on strategies based on the identified gaps in housing and services and the proposed changes to the homeless system. These strategies should include the identification of financial and non-financial resources needed to support proposed strategies.*

## Summarize Priority Gaps and Create Groupings Which Interrelate

After determining and prioritizing gaps, it is important to look at how these gaps interrelate to assist with strategy development. The Core Working Group or designee should summarize the quantitative and qualitative information used to reach decisions regarding relative priority. This summary is an informational document for the larger Continuum of Care groups and will provide a basis for the strategy development.

In addition, the Core Working Group or designee should propose some possible “groupings” or linkages among priority gaps as a way to get stakeholders to begin to think of gaps in the context of a homeless system of care. Major gaps in housing and services should be looked at as they interrelate to each other, for example mental health street outreach, transitional housing for people with mental illness, and permanent supportive housing for people with mental illness are related. This should also help identify where there are “systems” issues rather than just capacity issues. For example, a lack of transitional housing capacity may best be addressed by the addition of supports to encourage more movement out of transitional housing and into permanent housing rather than by increasing transitional housing capacity. (See W-12: Group Exercise to Develop Strategies, W-13: Strategy Statement Worksheet.)

## Develop Strategies and Action Steps

Strategy development may occur through a series of community meetings, or the Core Working Group could facilitate the creation of subcommittees, each of which would be responsible for developing strategy statements and preliminary action steps for grouped priority gaps. These subcommittees may enlist the expertise of other community members in the process of developing strategies. The length of time and number of meetings necessary for this step in the process will vary based on the size and experience of the community, but will likely involve 2 to 3 community meetings.

- Using the priority gaps identified (i.e. mental health counseling, transitional housing for families, etc.), consider the relationship between and among gaps.
- Group these linked needs into major gaps, where possible, and develop a draft long-range strategy for each.
- Consider strategies that do not require funding but which call for changes in policies, procedures, or re-allocation of existing resources.
- Assess the availability of federal, state, local and private resources that might be used to fund the implementation of identified strategies.
- Make “ball-park” estimates of costs and identify potential sources of funding.
- Seek assistance concerning mainstream and other non-HUD resources as needed.

## Link Gaps to Possible Resources

The Core Working Group should organize the inventory of homeless capacity and mainstream resources by the groupings created from the exercise above. This is necessary to assist with strategy development by looking at gaps alongside existing capacity and possible mainstream resources.

This capacity and resources list (based on the inventory developed earlier in the planning process) can be reorganized to be consistent with the relative priority gaps identified. In addition, further fact finding or information gathering may be necessary regarding possible or potential resources.

This review of possible resources is an informational document for the larger Continuum of Care group and will help ensure that participants develop strategies in the context of existing homeless and mainstream capacity. Furthermore, it will help ensure that strategies address necessary changes in the use of resources as well as any need for new resources in the system.

## Assign Responsibilities and Develop Timeframes

- To ensure that the Continuum of Care plan is outcome oriented, each strategy should include action steps, point(s) of accountability, and a time frame.
- Determine appropriate time frames needed (i.e. 5-10 years) to demonstrate significant improvements over time.
- Identify which organization(s) should be responsible for each “next step”.
- Once developed, strategies and action steps should be made available for community input and comment. (These action steps will provide the community with a road map for implementing the Continuum of Care plan.)

*(See W-14: Questions to Use to Assess Your Draft Plan before Finalization)*

For example, youth system (county or state) discharge planning (or lack thereof) may result in growing numbers of young people falling into homelessness upon discharge, particularly those who lack existing natural supports in the community. Engaging policy makers and advocating for changes in discharge planning and procedure may be an appropriate long-term strategy to prevent this sub-population from becoming homeless.

## Adopt a Written Continuum of Care Plan

Once the decision-making is completed, the Core Working Group, perhaps with help from designees, drafts the Continuum of Care plan. Much of the outline for the plan has been developed as part of the planning process.

- Many communities seek the endorsement of the plan from key public officials to lend it clout and legitimacy, especially in the areas of policy changes and leveraging main-stream resources.
- The Core Working Group may want to disseminate the plan to key stakeholders and policy-makers to publicize its vision and articulated strategies.

## Outcomes

- Prioritized gaps summarized and groupings created
- Strategies, action steps and time lines established
- Vision statement and written plan for Continuum of Care development

4-1

### Sample Strategy Statements Based on Priority Gaps

- Foster creation of 100 new units of permanent supportive housing over the next two years
- Expand economic development programs across the Continuum of Care to increase self-sufficiency and provide greater access to permanent housing
- Facilitate the development of programs to address the specific needs of critically underserved homeless sub-populations, such as youth
- Achieve a more efficient and cost-effective system by advocating for and directing mainstream city and state housing and service resources to people who are homeless
- Integrate planning for homeless housing and services with other mainstream planning processes

4-2

### Questions to Help Craft Action Steps

- Is there an opportunity, project, or activity which will be lost if not begun immediately?
- Is there a timing issue where one action step is necessary before others can be taken?
- Is the amount of effort needed to undertake the activity reasonable? (Starting out with the most complex activities may not be a good strategy)
- How critical is this strategy?
- Is the proposed activity feasible?
- Are there major barriers to implementing the activity?

## Case Study

### Boston – Planning Process

Since 1993, the City has coordinated a solid strategic planning and systems implementation approach, involving the Emergency Shelter Commission, Public Facilities Department, and the Homeless Planning Committee. The Homeless Planning Committee, whose 84 public and private members include homeless shelter and service providers, advocacy organizations, housing providers, homeless and formerly homeless persons, a veterans group, and local business leaders, meet monthly to discuss policy and to further the development of systems for implementation. The committee is well linked to other related strategic planning processes within the City and to providers and entities outside of the homeless continuum. Boston's Continuum of Care process is a truly collaborative process, stressing community-based involvement with strong leadership from the City and the Homeless Planning Committee.

#### Implementation

The implementation of all aspects of the Continuum of Care plan has been strengthened by the support of HUD's Homeless Assistance contract and award process. The result is that while current resources are still not adequate to meet the needs of each homeless person in the city, Boston's homeless assistance system now addresses all phases of the housing and services continuum.

Boston's homeless service planning is well organized and coordinates an extensive range of services that reflect the goals of HUD's Continuum of Care model, utilizing a community-based process to implement a system-oriented housing and services delivery model. In addition, the City has contracted with a local university to assist Supportive Housing Programs with data management, monitoring, and evaluation, representing a major step toward the further development of outcome-oriented assessment methodologies.

#### Current Operation of Continuum of Care

As a result of the Continuum of Care planning process, homeless persons living in Boston have more options in their efforts to re-enter the economic mainstream, largely as a result of increased and improved linkages among homeless service providers and entities outside of homeless services. Collaboration and communication among city agencies and homeless service providers has improved through this process, with the result being that each member of the housing assistance system in Boston can focus on their specific role in the continuum while also coordinating their efforts to reach common objectives.

Another result of the planning process was that homeless providers in the city "buy in" to a systems approach to homelessness assistance—the coordinating agencies believe that the front, middle, and back end of the continuum are of equal importance. Finally, the continuum process encouraged the integration of planning for homeless services and housing into the more comprehensive community economic development process, thereby providing more efficient and cost-effective planning and better coordination of city and state housing and service resources to the homeless population.

Source: U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development, *The Continuum of Care: A Report on the New Federal Policy to Address Homelessness*, December 1996 (prepared by Barnard-Columbia Center for Urban Policy, Columbia University).